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What You Need to Know About Real ID and Travel

Travelers now have until 2025 to get the upgraded driver's licenses for security screening



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By Christina Ianzito, & Jacquelyne Froeber, AARP



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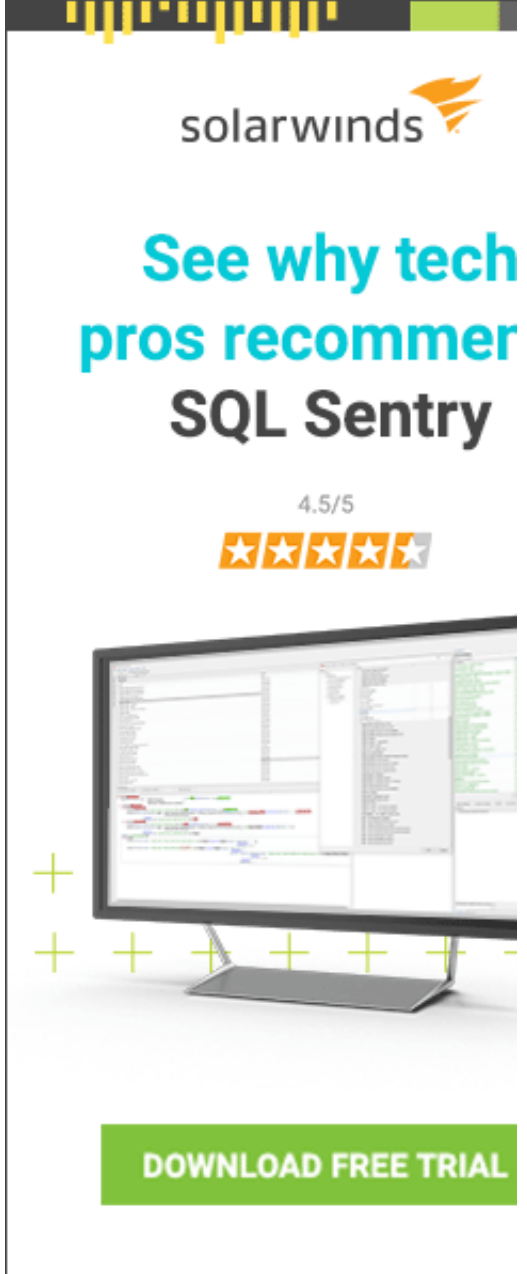
[The U.S. Department of Homeland Security \(DHS\)](#) will begin enforcing the Real ID law on May 7, 2025. The new deadline follows a previous deadline of May 3, 2023, which was deemed unworkable in part due to the pandemic and its continued disruption of states' abilities to issue the Real ID-compliant

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driver's licenses. The DHS issued a statement on Dec. 5 saying the new deadline will give state licensing agencies time to work through the backlogs created by the pandemic. The extension also gives the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) time to "implement innovations" to make the process as smooth as possible.

If this sounds familiar, the enforcement date, first set for 2008, has been delayed multiple times.



Conceived as part of 2005 legislation in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Real ID law requires people to show security-enhanced IDs to pass through airport security checkpoints or to enter certain federal facilities, such as military bases, once the regulations begin to be enforced. Travelers will also be able to use passports or certain other federal documents as an alternative to a Real ID.



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Sometimes called the Star Card, because most states are marking their Real ID cards with a gold or black star in the top right corner, it must include an encoded “machine readable zone,” like a passport’s, with a person’s scannable information. Many state driver’s licenses already have this feature. The key thing that makes the card special is that the federal government requires you to provide certain identifying documentation to obtain one from your state.

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The DHS has spent years on its Real ID public information campaign, but many people remain confused over how to get the cards and what they are.



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A few basics about Real ID:

- To get a Real ID, you need to present documents to your DMV proving your age and identity, Social Security number and address. That generally means bringing a birth certificate or passport, a Social Security card or tax form such as a W-2, and two proofs of address. If you've changed your name

through marriage, you'll need a marriage certificate.

- Although the Real ID is also a driver's license, the old-style driver's license is still lawful for driving and still available as an option in many states. Some, such as Arizona and Kentucky, are trying to make this clear by calling the Real ID a Travel ID. New Jersey continues to issue standard state licenses, which are marked with the words "Not for 'REAL ID' purposes."
- After May 7, 2025, a regular driver's license won't be sufficient to get a passenger through security and onto a plane. The Real ID technically is not mandatory because you can instead use other approved documents, including a passport, passport card, U.S. military ID, Enhanced ID (offered in some states) or an ID from the federal government's Trusted Traveler Program, such as a [Global Entry card](#).

- For international travel, you'll still need a passport.

Editor's note: This story was originally published Aug. 23, 2019. It was updated to reflect the new Real ID deadline.

Christina Ianzito covers scams and fraud, and is the books editor for aarp.org and AARP The Magazine. Also a longtime travel writer and editor, she received a 2020 Lowell Thomas Award for travel writing from the Society of American Travel Writers Foundation.

Jacquelyne Froeber is an award-winning journalist based in Las Vegas, Nevada. She writes and edits travel content for AARP.org.

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